

## **Combat Birding: Avian Research with the Rock Island District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Upper Mississippi River**

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Overall, many avian populations have been declining throughout the Midwest region during the last half century. These reductions in population have been attributed primarily to habitat alteration and loss due to various human activities. In fact, throughout Illinois and Iowa, some of the largest remaining “patches” of natural habitat occurs within the floodplain of the Upper Mississippi River (UMR). Most of this land is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

As a consequence, the Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has conducted three avian monitoring projects within the floodplain forests of the UMR for 20+ years. During this presentation, we will summarize changes in land use within Illinois and Iowa and discuss how this has influenced the importance of the UMR floodplain system to Midwestern avifaunal populations. We will also discuss the important links between habitat diversity and abundant food resources as they relate to avian use within the UMR floodplain.

Additionally, this presentation will highlight the various difficulties encountered when working in the UMR floodplain, along with the numerous threats facing these critical floodplain habitats.

Within the context of these various factors, we will discuss the three avian point count survey projects conducted by the Rock Island District (Pleasant Creek/Huron Island, Milan Bottoms, and Long Island), including the varying objectives and survey methods.

To date, only preliminary summaries of species richness have been examined. In 25 years of survey work at Pleasant Creek/Huron Island, more than 150 species have been identified during migration and breeding seasons. During 2 breeding seasons at Milan Bottoms, 84 species were recorded, including 17 Permanent Residents (RES), 34 North American Migrants (NAM), and 33 Neotropical Migrants (NTM). Breeding season data was collected for 2 years at Long Island. A total of 100 species were reported (18 RES, 35 NAM, and 47 NTM).